



YOSEMITE

NATIONAL PARK

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe."

— John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 1869

PLANNING UPDATE

Volume 23

January 2003

"Managing a place as complex as Yosemite National Park requires the involvement of everyone interested in its future."

Dear Yosemite Friends,

I N JANUARY OF 1997, a flood unlike any in recent memory swept through Yosemite National Park. Despite the damage it caused to lodging facilities and campgrounds, it underscored the importance of allowing natural processes to prevail. The flood of 1997 also brought in its wake a number of improvement projects that—six years later—are finally coming to fruition. As Yosemite's new superintendent, I intend to see each one through.

I am committed to carrying forward the important work that has taken place since the flood. The *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan* stands stalwart as a guiding document for the future protection of the Merced River and its 81 miles of splendor in Yosemite National Park. The actions outlined in the *Yosemite Valley Plan* will likewise ensure the protection of Yosemite Valley's natural and cultural resources while allowing visitors to enjoy this amazing park.



I also recognize that managing a place as complex as Yosemite National Park requires the involvement of everyone interested in its future. Our commitment to continued conversations with the public remains firm. In the months ahead, park staff will host regular open

houses here in Yosemite Valley to not only share progress on various planning efforts, but to hear from you—your questions, your concerns, your ideas.

When I became superintendent of Yosemite National Park, I joined a National Park Service staff that has proven to be passionate and dedicated stewards of protection and preservation of this special place. Together—with your continued support and participation—we will carry out the work ahead.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Tollefson
Park Superintendent



NPS Photo by Kristina Rylands*

On-the-Ground Mapping

Survey flags can be found along the Merced River in portions of Yosemite Valley, marking the river protection zone.

Introducing YNP Superintendent Michael J. Tollefson

ON JANUARY 3, 2002, Yosemite Superintendent David A. Mihalic retired after a distinguished National Park Service career that spanned three decades. He is replaced by Michael J. Tollefson who returns to the Sierra from Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee, where he served as superintendent since 2000.

Tollefson's long career with the National Park Service includes the superintendency of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks in California and Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska. He also served as a ranger in Katmai, Denali, and Lake Clark National Parks and Preserves in Alaska, as well as the Virgin Islands and North Cascades National Parks. He has been in policy leadership positions in the National Park Service's Pacific Northwest regional office.

Yosemite National Park staff extends a warm welcome to its new superintendent!

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The Planning Update is an occasional publication of the National Park Service, Office of the Superintendent, Yosemite National Park, P. O. Box 577, Yosemite, CA 95389.

Kristina Rylands edited this issue with contributions from David Siegenthaler and Sue Beatty.

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What's New at the Old Campgrounds?

In January of 1997, one of the greatest floods in the park's history demonstrated the vulnerability of facilities constructed in the Merced River floodplain. Among the many Yosemite Valley facilities affected, it inundated the Upper and Lower River Campgrounds, along with a portion of Lower Pines Campground. Since that time, those campground areas have been closed.

To some, these closures may be a disappointment. However, the flood presented park managers with a fresh starting point for examining the importance of riverside environments. These former campgrounds are part of the Merced River ecosystem, which is considered a highly valued resource in Yosemite Valley. The river and its banks, known as the riparian zone, are increasingly recognized as important habitat for many plant and animal species. Seasonal flooding of the river is an important natural process that contributes nutrients to wetlands, recharges groundwater, and improves water quality. Restoration efforts will return these important functions to the east end of Yosemite Valley.

In 2000, the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan* (Merced River Plan) established the guidance for protecting 81 miles of the Merced River corridor in Yosemite National Park. By December of that same year, the *Yosemite Valley Plan* outlined some of the park's most important preservation efforts. Today, planning for one of those projects—the ecological restoration of the former campgrounds—is getting underway.

WHAT IS ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION?

Ecological restoration seeks to restore natural processes to an ecosystem so that the area can recover from past human development and activities. This effort begins with any needed research and leads to hands-on work to improve degraded, damaged, or destroyed sites. Examples of areas requiring ecological restoration include those that have been paved, filled, trampled, or rivers and streams that have been channelized, diverted, or dammed.

Ecological restoration can include:

- Removing imported fill material, abandoned roads, and infrastructure
- Re-establishing the natural contours on the land
- Returning natural surface and ground water movement (hydrology)
- Replanting native vegetation and removing non-native plant and animal species
- Restoring carbon and nitrogen cycles in degraded soils

HOW HAVE CONDITIONS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

The land of the former Upper and Lower River Campgrounds, along with a portion of Lower Pines Campground, once looked very different from the densely forested areas we see today. Beginning in the late 1800s, visitors began camping along the riverbanks and in the meadows in the east end of Yosemite Valley. Low areas of land were filled to make level campsites, natural water flows were diverted, Native American and natural burning of the area was stopped, and conifers were allowed to grow. The area originally consisted of rich loam soils, wetlands, and a mosaic of riparian, meadow, and black oak woodland communities.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY?

Planning for the ecological restoration is currently underway. Biologists, historians, hydrologists, educators, archeologists, Native American groups, and land managers are working together to develop a restoration plan with an integrated and comprehensive approach. Currently, information about historical conditions, soil and vegetation types, and river dynamics are being gathered and analyzed and will be used to create the ecological restoration plan.



NPS Photo by Kristina Rylands*

Letting Nature Prevail

In keeping with the *Yosemite Valley Plan*, flood-damaged campgrounds, like this northern section of Lower Pines, will be returned to a mosaic of riparian, meadow, and black oak woodland communities.

Yosemite Valley Plan, visitors will be able to enjoy the former campgrounds in a new way—one that will preserve and protect these important riparian areas of the Valley for future generations.

This ecological restoration process will be an exciting and fascinating experience for all in Yosemite National Park. Over the past 15 years, restoration efforts at Stoneman, Sentinel, and Cook's Meadows, and many river restoration projects have led resource managers to understand the ways in which ecosystems have been altered in Yosemite Valley.

Restoration is not about returning an area back to a snapshot in time. Rather, it looks at natural processes and returning these vital functions to an ecosystem. With the guidance provided in the *Merced Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plan* and the actions called for in the

Latest Developments

The National Park Service appreciates the public's involvement during the recent formal public comment periods. Planning teams are now in the process of considering those comments and preparing written documents that will soon be available for public review. Here is an update of some of the major projects and an anticipated timeline for the release of future documents:

Environmental Impact Statements

Late Winter:

Final Yosemite Fire Management Plan/EIS

Late Spring:

Environmental Education Campus Development/Draft EIS

Environmental Assessments

February:

Cascades Diversion Dam Removal Project Environmental Assessment

Early Spring:

South Fork Bridge Replacement Project Environmental Assessment

Late March or Early April:

Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment Environmental Assessment

Late Spring:

Curry Village and East Yosemite Valley Campground Improvements Project Environmental Assessment

Project Updates

Recent field surveys and a review of potential impacts already analyzed in the *Yosemite Valley Plan* have determined that the project to replace Yosemite Valley flood-damaged offices in El Portal has already achieved its necessary compliance. Therefore this project will not proceed to an environmental assessment. However, public input will continue to be sought as planning progresses.

The Curry Village Employee Housing project has moved to a preliminary decision on design and continues to seek public and staff involvement through workshops and open houses held in the park.

OTHER CAMPGROUND NEWS

In late 2002, the park was directed by Congress to complete a study of various opportunities for camping outside of Yosemite Valley. That report was submitted to Congress in December and outlines the feasibility of expanding and adding campgrounds along the road corridors elsewhere in the park. Once direction is given to the National Park Service by Congress, there may be further opportunities for public involvement.

An environmental assessment is being prepared which will look at improvements to Curry Village and east Yosemite Valley campgrounds. Among the many actions called for in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*, this document will evaluate plans for reconfiguring campgrounds at Upper and Lower Pines. It will also consider designs at the new South Camp and Tenaya Creek Campgrounds. The Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment Project will include designs for the expansion of Camp 4, as outlined in the *Yosemite Valley Plan*.

YOU ARE INVITED

Mark Your Calendar for Early
2003 Open Houses
Yosemite Valley Visitor Center
East Auditorium

February 26, 2:00–6:00 p.m.

March 28, 2:00–8:00 p.m.

April 23, 2:00–6:00 p.m.

To help keep costs down,
you are encouraged to
view planning documents
online by visiting
www.nps.gov/yose/planning



NPS Photo by Kristina Bjelands*

Stay Involved!

In the months to come, several planning efforts will release documents during their official public comment period. If you are interested in receiving a copy for review, please check the boxes below that apply. **If you have already requested one of these planning documents, you do not need to submit another request.**

Final Yosemite Fire Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

☐ Printed copy

☐ CD ROM

Environmental Education Campus Development/Draft Environmental Impact Statement

☐ Printed copy

☐ CD ROM

Cascades Diversion Dam Removal Project Environmental Assessment

☐ Printed copy

South Fork Bridge Replacement Project Environmental Assessment

☐ Printed copy

Curry Village & East Yosemite Valley Campground Improvements Environmental Assessment

☐ Printed copy

☐ CD ROM

Yosemite Lodge Area Redevelopment Environmental Assessment

☐ Printed copy

☐ CD ROM

Yosemite Valley Plan (Decision document, approx. 150 pages)

☐ Printed copy

☐ CD ROM



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